

***re-sung***  
***re-do. re-learn. re-imagine.***

**A Poulenc Parade**

17 November 2021

7pm - St John the Divine, Kennington

Lucy Anderson, Lauren Lodge-Campbell, Michael Lafferty,  
Ceferina Penny, Esme Bronwen-Smith

Dylan Perez, piano

**An Exploration of Songs by Francis Poulenc**

Le Bestiaire

Le dromadaire  
Le chèvre du Tibet  
La sauterelle  
Le dauphin  
L'écrevisse  
La carpe

Guillaume Apollinaire

Fiançailles pour rire

La Dame d'André  
Dans l'herbe  
Il vole  
Mon cadavre est doux comme un gant  
Violon  
Fleurs

Louise de Vilmorin

Trois poèmes de Louise de Vilmorin

Un garçon de Liège  
Au-delà!  
Aux officiers de la Garde Blanche

Quatre poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire

L'anguille  
Carte postale  
Avant le cinéma  
1904

Cinq poèmes de Max Jacob

Chanson Bretonne  
Cimetière  
La petite servante  
Berceuse  
Souric et Mouric

C.

Louis Aragon

*La Dame de Monte Carlo*

Jean Cocteau

**Welcome back to *re-sung!*** We are so glad to see you here. This week's concert is focused on one of the most distinctive composers in modern history: Francis Poulenc. Poulenc was a one-of-a-kind composer who did not follow the trendy twelve-tone and extended techniques of other composers in the early 20th century. He was a self-taught composer and described his technique in the following way: "*My 'rules' are instinctive, I am not concerned with principles and I am proud of that; I have no system of writing (for me 'system' means 'tricks');* and as for inspiration, it is so mysterious that it is wiser not to try to explain it."

Poulenc's songs are at the heart of his compositional output. He was very fond of a beautiful voice and energised when he found poetry that really spoke to him. Pierre Bernac, his partner in music and life, was his muse and guided him through composing for the voice.

One of his earliest compositions, ***Le bestiaire*** already shows a unique artistic voice. Within the words of Apollinaire, there is always tenderness, nostalgia, and lyricism, even if the poems seem trite or ironic. Each song in this set is about an animal and the way they reflect in the life of the poet. In *Le dromadaire* (the camel), Apollinaire wishes to roam the world like Don Pedro d'Alfaroubeira, who is so wealthy he owns **four** camels. *Le chèvre de Thibet* (the Tibetan goat) describes the finest hair of a goat, but it is not as fine as the poet's beloved. *La sauterelle* (the grasshopper) is the nourishment of St. John, and the poet only wishes that his words will be the same feast for grand people. In *Le dauphin* (the dolphin) Apollinaire describes the jollity of dolphins swimming around even though the water is mucky, just as life is happy sometimes and then can turn cruel at a moment's notice. The fickle *L'ecrevisse* (the crab) speaks about uncertainty - the feeling that makes people look backwards and doubt themselves, just like the crabs. The static world of *La carpe* (the carp) is full of melancholy; they move so slowly that maybe even death has forgotten they exist.

Another one of Poulenc's favourite poets was Louise de Vilmorin; he writes, "Love, desire, illness, exile, and money difficulties, were at the root of her genuineness". The set of songs that make up ***Fiançailles pour rire*** (Whimsical Betrothal) are some of Poulenc's most popular songs, even though he thought them not as deep as settings of Apollinaire or Eluard. *La dame d'André* (André's woman friend) depicts a couple who has just gotten married. André does not know who his new wife is, though, or how she will fit into his life. The intense second song *Dans l'herbe* (In the grass) paints a picture of someone who has died in the grass, far from his lover (or anyone) to hear his cries. *Il vole* (He flies) is based on the double meaning of the word 'vole' - to fly or to thief. A woman is lamenting the fact that her lover has stolen her heart, but does not want her. In the slightly sensual and unsettling poem *Mon cadavre est doux comme un gant* (My corpse is as soft as a glove), the narrator is looking at herself in a coffin. She no longer has any connections with human emotion and tells the children around her to keep living, forgetting of her life. Poulenc composed *Violon* (Violin) in a Hungarian restaurant and you can certainly hear it in the music. There is a swagger in the piano part that shows the elegance and sexiness of the violin and violin-player. *Fleurs* (Flowers) is one of Poulenc's greatest; it concerns a woman who is burning tokens of a past love in her fireplace.

The ***Trois poèmes de Louise de Vilmorin*** depict a woman in three stages of love. She becomes enamoured with a young man who she shares a night with, only to have him leave her for other women in *Le garçon de Liège*. In *Au-delà!*, she remembers this sexy night and says she chooses pleasure always. In *Aux officiers de la Garde Blanche* she prays to God to let her not fall for another man like this one who has left her.

Back to Apollinaire now, with **Quatre poèmes de Apollinaire** which are among the most authentic combination of poetry and music. *L'anguille* (The eel) describes a Parisian night where one can see a dead woman in a hotel room, people playing cards, and an insane person crying out 'Vichy!'. *Carte Postale* (Postcard) was written as such to a woman who Apollinaire was trying to woo (it didn't work out). A narrator is speaking about modern day artists in *Avant le cinéma* (Before the cinema); true artists are not those who buy art, but those who create art, like actors and actresses. And they are definitely not the old provincial professors who call the cinema by its old name: the cinematograph. *1904* depicts a crazed carnival in Strasbourg where one meets all kinds of people and eats better than kings, but he just misses his lover!

The poetry **Cinq poèmes de Max Jacob** was written in reverence of the poet's homeland of Brittany. *Chanson Bretonne* (Song from Brittany) is a scene in the morning market where a poor girl is recounting her misfortunes. In *Cimetière* (Cemetery), a girl says that if her sailor boyfriend leaves, she will surely die, and her family will only be able to visit her grave and bring gilded wreaths to decorate it. The girl is *La petite servante* (The small servant) is frenetically praying to God to keep away all kinds of illnesses and troubles. She only asks to grow up quickly and to have a husband who is not a drunk and will not beat her every night. In *Berceuse*, the same servant girl is looking after the child of her employers. She is the babysitter from hell and wishes all kinds of maladies on the baby in the hopes that it will die and she will be able to go fishing to make soup, which is what she really wants to do. *Souric et Mouric* is a tricky poem - the beginning describes two rodents who help teach a spider to weave linen on the loom. At the end, the narrator is telling all the animals of the night (tree-frogs, blackbird, and magpie) to listen and learn how to sing from it.

One of Poulenc's most famous (and rightly so) songs is **C**. It describes the dark period of the German invasion and the French resistance during the war in 1940. A large part of the French population had fled before the armies invaded; the poet is recounting the crossing of a bridge named Cé. He describes the confusion and destruction of France as he does the only thing he can do to save his life: leave.

A fabulous monologue written by Jean Cocteau, **La dame de Monte Carlo** (The woman of Monte Carlo) was composed for soprano Denise Duval. She created the title characters in both of his operas as well as 'Elle' in the one woman tragedy *La voix humaine*. *Monte Carlo* is a portrait of a woman who is old, down on her gambling luck, and trying to relive her glory days. She has bursts of anger and violence, but is basically sad and pathetic as she contemplates suicide, her last resort out. As she jumps and cries out the name of the sacred gambling site, the final chord in the piano is a small inconsequential splash of sea water.

*Biographies of the performers and more information about **re-sung** can be found at:*  
[www.re-sung.co.uk](http://www.re-sung.co.uk)

*For more information on Francis Poulenc and the poets in this concert, the following books are highly recommended:*

*Francis Poulenc: The Man and his Songs* - Pierre Bernac  
*Poulenc: The Life in the Songs* - Graham Johnson  
*Poulenc: A Biography* - Roger Nichols